



Universal Newborn Hearing Screening

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Family and Community Health
Division of Perinatal and Early Childhood Health
Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program
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The Department of Public Health has implemented the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program in Massachusetts in accordance with Chapter 243 of the Acts of 1998. Hospitals are required to perform a hearing screening on all newborns prior to discharge. Infants who are identified with a hearing loss early and receive intervention services before six months of age have better language, speech and social skills than children whose hearing loss is identified later. The program works with the hospitals and birth centers to ensure that all newborns receive a hearing screening prior to discharge and that the babies receive appropriate services. Without newborn hearing screening, babies with hearing loss were often identified as late as 2.5 years old.

The following is a list of common questions and answers regarding the hearing screening:

Who performs the hearing screening?

Newborn hearing screening can be done by a wide variety of people in the hospital or birth center. Nurses, technicians, audiologists, and highly trained volunteers often perform the hearing screening.

How is the screening performed?

The screening test is simple. It is not invasive and most babies sleep through the test. It is done at the hospital or birth center before the infant is discharged.

If a baby does not pass the hearing screening, does that mean that the baby has a hearing loss?

No. A screening test looks for signs of possible hearing loss. If a baby did not pass a hearing screening, the baby is referred to a Department of Public Health approved audiological diagnostic center for additional testing. It is important that this appointment be kept. After diagnostic testing, some babies will be found to have normal hearing and some babies will be found to have a hearing loss.

Is the hearing screening covered by health insurance plans?

Yes. Most health insurance plans cover the cost of the newborn hearing screening. Families that do not have a health insurance plan that pays for the newborn hearing screening should call 1-800-882-1435 for more information.

How many babies are identified with hearing loss?

Approximately 4 infants out of 1,000 will have some form of hearing loss. In Massachusetts, where we have 82,000 births annually, we would expect that about 320 babies would be born with some degree of hearing loss.

Can babies born with hearing loss have parents who hear?

Yes. Ninety percent of children born with hearing loss have parents who hear, and about ten percent have parents who are deaf themselves.

What services are available for children with hearing loss?

The Early Intervention Program helps parents of children from birth to age three to recognize and understand their child's special developmental needs. The Early Intervention team works with the family. Together they figure out what type of help will be best. The Early Intervention Program is also in the Department of Public Health.

Who supports universal hearing screening?

The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing (2000) Position Statement endorsed the goal of universal detection of hearing loss in infants before three months of age, and appropriate intervention no later than six months of age. Joint Committee on Infant Hearing member organizations that approved this statement include: The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the American Academy of Otolaryngology—Head and Neck Surgery, the American Academy of Pediatrics and Directors of Speech and Hearing Programs in State Health and Welfare Agencies.

Where can I get more information?

Please call the Universal Newborn Hearing Screening Program at 1-800-882-1435 or 617-624-5992 (TTY) at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. You can also e-mail us at Newborn.Hearing@state.ma.us.